

Annual Report: 2010-2011

Activities of External Affairs in India

The Department of External Affairs was happy to work at the national level as well as accompany the Bahá'í community of India at regional and local levels in a number of activities of external affairs that can be easily categorized under three broad headings:

1. Diplomatic work: It constitutes building relations with agencies and individuals serving within the government system, as well as members of the diplomatic code, and United Nations agencies. This category also includes activities aimed at defense of the human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran.
2. Public Information work: constitutes building relations with media (electronic and press), presence on the World Wide Web, and the use of face book, blogs, twitters, etc. within a framework for action, as well as production and distribution of programmes for viewing on television in India
3. Discourses of Society: this includes activities related to the deployment of methods and approaches for promotion of social discourses, such as the ones on science, religion and development, the equality of men and women, governance, education and interfaith relations. The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity accompanies the Department of External Affairs in this area of endeavour with the provision of content, etc.

Diplomatic Work

Defense of the Faith:

Based on communications from the Bahá'í World Centre in the months of April, May, June, August, December 2010 and February and March 2011, and subsequent communications from the Bahá'í International Community a number of lines of action were taken at national levels as well as at local levels: These consisted of communicating with government officials including those at the highest levels, officials of the ministry of external affairs and members of parliament. Subsequent meetings took place with Smt. Sushma Swaraj, and the officials at the Ministry of External Affairs. 18 press releases were issued during this period, friends contacted numerous prominent people, interfaith leaders, academics, organizations of civil society and members of parliament and three Open Letters were issued jointly signed by over 100 prominent Indians across all strata representational of the judiciary, interfaith,

educational sectors as well as NGOs and human rights organizations. The media coverage both online as well as print media has helped a lot in shaping public opinion. The coverage has been in English, Hindi, Kannad, Marathi, Malayalam and other languages. Special mention should be made of Lucknow, Pune, Mumbai, Nashik, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore and Kannur. In Lucknow alone, there has been coverage of press releases on the situation of Baha'is of Iran in eight local dailies in June, one in August, one in September, ten in December and thirteen coverage in January 2011 in both English and Hindi dailies.

The help and assistance of all institutions, taskforces and individuals in bringing this matter to the public domain is truly appreciated and would no doubt serve as a great consolation to our beleaguered brethren in Iran. This period also saw Archbishop Vincent Concesso, Swamy Agnivesh, Justice Krishna Iyer, Mohini Giri, Maja Daruwala, Asghar Ali Engineer and a network of voluntary organizations in India, VANI, write individual letters to the government and leadership of Iran, through the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, asking for immediate release of the Bahá'ís. An India campaign in collaboration with United4Iran and co-organised by Asian Centre for Human Rights, Indian Baha'i Community, People's Watch and Women's Coalition for Peace and Development with Dignity was launched on 10th June 2010 through a peaceful march for release of all prisoners of conscience in Iran with Swamy Agnivesh in the lead and subsequently there was another march on 11th June in Madurai spearheaded by People's Watch. Numerous post cards were signed demanding release of the prisoners. A video clip on this was hosted by United4Iran. In addition United4Iran sponsored a cartoon video produced by some friends from India depicting the story of persecution in Ivel which affected the livestock belonging to the Bahá'ís!! The period also witnessed the hosting of special prayer services for the release of Yaran and the end of all human rights violations at the Bahá'í House of Worship as well as all over the country.

PRAYER SERVICE



A Special Prayer Service organized on 14th May 2010 to show solidarity with the seven innocent Baha'i leaders in Iran (Yaran)

Strengthening relations with prominent individuals

- On the occasion of **birthday anniversary of Baha'u'llah** organised a dinner reception on 12th November for our high level contacts. About 19 attended the reception.
- In honour of **Bani Dugal**, organized a special luncheon at Baha'i House. 31 attended.
- Naw Ruz celebration on 20 March 2011 at the Bahá'í House of Worship

Orissa:

- ***Minister was the chief guest for the 193rd birth anniversary of the blessed beauty (Orissa)***

Minister for public relations, Panchayatraj Mr.Prafulla Samal from Govt. of Orissa was the chief guest in the Birth Anniversary of Baha'u'llah on 11th November 2010. It was a gathering of 420 peoples. Media persons were presented there.



- ***Member of Parliament and former Education Secretary and other Professors from different colleges participated in Children's Conference***

Mr. Prasana patsani Member of Parliament inaugurated the closing ceremony of the children's festival in Bhubaneswar in the month of January. More than 200 children from different backgrounds participated. The Local spiritual assembly of Bhubaneswar organized it.



(Member of Parliament in orange dress) (children at a moment- 2nd photo)

- **A seminar on junior youth educational empowerment**



A high-level seminar on junior youths was held in Benipur, a remote village of Nimapara cluster. The seminar was named as Reflection 2010 and it was based on the junior youth educational empowerment. The aim was to introduce the junior youth empowerment program to the higher strata of the society. The occasion was 5th September, Teachers day. More than 80 students occupied the big hall of that school and 40 people were standing and sitting all together. The chairman who is the chief of that village welcomed the guests and audiences present out there. Prof. Manmohan Mohanty the renowned scientist from India to the United Nations Department of WORLD HERITAGE SITE SURVEY was the chief guest. He spoke about the current situation of the present society. He shared his experience of meeting with Dr. Radhakrishnan in the mogul gardens of Rastrapati Bhavan. Then he welcomed such types of social programs for

the improvement of the civilization.



Mumbai:

- **Teaching Opportunities during Rotary Club Meeting:** Dr Mangesh Teli, accompanied by Mrs. Teli and Shehnaz Furudi, addressed Bandra Rotarians, at Ottors club, during their meeting as an invited speaker on 12th October 2010. About 40 friends were present that mainly included professionals, businessmen and their spouses. The topic of the address was "Success in Life", and it encompassed the present day situation, the reasons behind success, how it impacts our life, the true purpose of life, parameters of success and true success.
- **Rotary club Meeting at Versova:** On 12th November, an invitation was extended by the Rotarians to Dr Mangesh Teli to be the speaker for that evening. Taking up this opportunity to celebrate the Birth anniversary of Bahauallah, the invitation was accepted. Both of them attended the meeting at "The Club" at Andheri, with about 40 participants. Here, Dr Teli spoke on "Success, Ethics and Prosperity" and once again this meeting turned in to a very good discussion on the Baha'i Faith. There were a few friends with some prior knowledge of Baha'is and assumed the Baha'i Faith to be a sect of Islam. These assumptions were significantly cleared. All these professionals and businessmen got the message that they have to throw away the paralysis of will and become change agents.

Building relations with members of the diplomatic code:

The Temple is visited by many prominent people and High level dignitaries' including those from the Diplomatic community based in the capital city of Delhi. This has afforded opportunities to cultivate relations with many embassies based in Delhi many of whom are our guests at the Baha'i New Year celebrations and many who frequently visit the temple with their guests or for the cultural events held at the House of Worship under the ONE OCEAN banner. This year invitations were received from Taiwan Educational and Cultural Foundation, embassies of Israel, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Paraguay, Argentina, Luxembourg, Uganda, United States of America, Czech, Turkey, Romania, and Bhutan for functions at either the embassy or at the residence of the Ambassador. All these

meetings were attended by the colleague of Department of External Affairs at the Bahá'í House of Worship.



During the Month of the Commonwealth games in October 2010 the queen's baton relayed its way to the Baha'i house of Worship amongst various other places covering 190 thousand km across 71 nations. The baton has the ability to capture images and sound as it travels throughout the nations of the Commonwealth

A number of cultural events were held at the House of Worship under its own banner ONE OCEAN such as the Man who Laughs by Victor Hugo and performances by Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, and Pt. Raghunath Sethji.

Public Information Activities

- Baha'i article published in Volume 5, issue 1: January-March 2010 edition of Sustainability Tomorrow titled 'Spirituality's Contribution to Sustainable Development'.
- Article for Naw Ruz for Times of India titled "A new world order envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh"
- Press release "Religious leaders call for action on the environment, Poverty and Peace "
- Article dated 18 July 2010 on the Baha'i House of Worship published in *Sandhya Vir Arjun* newspaper, New Delhi.
- "Flowering Divinity", a write up on the Baha'I House of Worship in *SundayHerald art & culture* dated 25th July 2010
- Article on the Temple in magazine *Life*, August 2010 issue
- Meeting Mr. Vikas Singh, the Resident Editor of the Times of India regarding the negative news about "Baha'is having illicit relation" in Iran. Briefed him about the situation of the Baha'is in Iran and gave him a copy of the last press release.
- Write up on the Faith to Speaking Tree of TOI
- Reprint and dispatch of 3 issues of One Country Magazine
- Article for birthday of Baha'u'llah to Baha'is
- An interview with Bani Dugal on AIR. It took place on 18 Jan and broadcasted on 29 Jan 2011
- An interview with Bani Dugal by Narayani Ganesh of the Times of India and published in 2nd February issue

- Article on Technological Advancement for the Times of India, Bangalore Office, in relation with the use of technology at the Bahá'í House of Worship and its system for crowd management, January 2011. This was done in consultation with Mr. Javid.

Department of External Affairs at the Bahá'í House of Worship

As in previous years the Temple continues to draw National and International media interest. It has come to represent both, India and Delhi. During the year many agencies were attended to who wished to cover the Temple as a story for the Print or Electronic media or simply to use the Temple as a back drop to their coverage of other stories as in the case of the Common Wealth Games or as 'reference' or 'establishing' shots to establish their location - India or Delhi. These agencies were:

- United Breau
- Rooms & Menu's
- Q.TV
- CNEB
- Czech Television:
- Bindass Production
- Carrot Communications - 22nd Sept 2010
- Foxtel - Australia
- Zee Business
- Super Sport International
- Janta Tv
- ITV Wales News
- Jeevan Tv
- Network Ten - Common Wealth Games Broadcast 2010
- BTV Bulgaria - BTV The Globe
- Frontier TV -
- Wealth TV
- Danish Broadcasting Corporation
- New Wave Communication
- Durga Das Publications:
- News Express -
- Travel XP -

Bhopal: 6 articles on the Faith on the occasion of Baha'ullah's birthday, 12 November 2010 in Dainik Samachar in Bhopal.

Rajasthan (Jaipur):

- In the efforts of making good relations with the media, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Jaipur tried to meet the Chief Editors of the few Local Newspapers, accordingly was able to meet Mr Tiwari who is the chief editor in Rajasthan Patrika, and he was very happy to learn about the Bahai activities and their effect on society and said would help in every possible way and has requested to give the news or articles sometimes before the program directly on his email address, from the LSA a gift(a watch with the picture of Temple and few Bahai articles) was presented to him.

- DNA newspaper published a beautiful Article with a photograph about Bahá'ís of Jaipur.

Website, blog, face book, you tube and twitter of the Bahá'ís of India:

Our website www.bahai.in has now got a new look and a far more beautiful design. The introductory page of the website is also translated into Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil and Oriya. Thanks to all the Bahá'í friends who took the trouble of translating it into these languages and to the members of our taskforce on internet issues for uploading the new matter and the change of design. You are welcome to visit the site and give your suggestions to dea@ibnc.in . Please also send stories of your core activities and photographs to us. We have the face book, blog, twitter and you tube in the name of the Bahá'ís of India. You are welcome to visit, become fans and write in the blog too.

Bahá'í videos for broadcast on television and for distribution amongst the Bahá'ís:

After the successful broadcast of the first series of Bahá'í videos called Manavta ki Rah, Bisharat Media Associates in collaboration with Department of External Affairs is now into the second phase of its work in producing and distributing the series called “Ek Behtar Samaj ki aur” or Towards the Betterment of Society. The purpose of the proposed program is to provide the Bahá'í Faith with some "presence" on TV in India, taking its distinctive place alongside the other religious communities now broadcasting TV programs. Its aim is to highlight the Bahá'í understanding of religion as involving processes of learning among ordinary Indian believers of new patterns of religious life in families and communities. This particular feature of the Bahá'í Faith is probably not well understood by the several million Indians who are familiar with the Faith because of their exposure to the House of Worship.

- The purpose of these T.V Productions is to further enhance the promotion of the goals of the Five Year Plan
- To increase the viewers comfort level with the Faith, reducing psychological barriers.
- To help viewers understand that Bahai's of India come from diverse backgrounds and are their neighbours and friends.
- To introduce a few very general themes about religion that are of central importance to us and that are critical to a sound understanding of religion.
- These include prayer, Devotionals, personal study, value of studying in groups, children classes, classes for youth etc

Two episodes have been prepared in this series with Mr. Rohit Gandhi as the professional producer. The two series focus on the theme of gender equality and the title is “Samanta Ka Dharathal Par Samaj ka Badalta Hua

Aina” and the second one on removal of discrimination called “Prathaon se Aage Pragathi ki Aur”. Both are in Hindi and have been made with the help of the friends from Banthra, Kakori and Lucknow clusters. These videos have been already sent to Mumbai, Pune, Lucknow, Kakori, Banthra, Orissa, Indore, Kerala, Bidhuna, and are available at the Information centre of the Bahá'í House of Worship for viewing. Bahá'í friends who have copies of these videos are all encouraged to view them, show them to their contacts, colleagues, Bahá'ís and send feedback and comments to the Department of External Affairs for future videos that are being prepared.

Participation in Discourses of Society

The Department of External Affairs in the course of this year has been meaningfully engaging with the development community namely: Academicians, Organisations of civil society, Government and the United Nations agencies in the following areas of discourses:

- I. Discourse on Interfaith Relations
- II. Discourse on Equality of Women and Men
- III. Discourse on Governance
- IV. Discourse on Science, Religion and Development

Discourse on Interfaith Relations

The National Spiritual Assembly and the Bahá'í community of India throughout the country have been involved with interfaith activities for many years. Right from the translation of the statement, Communal Harmony, India's Greatest Challenge and the message of the Universal House of Justice to the World's Religious Leaders in various languages of India, as well as the statements of the Bahá'í International Community on thematic issues, the Indian Bahá'í community has engaged in interfaith discourse at various levels. Based on its experience in the course of the years and of previous year in particular, there are four areas of focus for interfaith discourse in India and the Bahá'ís are also part of this movement and trend:

1. Creating a culture of social action: The need for inter-religious solidarity in creating enabling environment for children, junior youth, youth and adults to engage in service for betterment of society. An event was held in collaboration with Tej Gyan Foundation at the Bahá'í House of Worship in September 2010 where the focus was on this issue.
2. Participation in discourses of society: To explore inter-religious dialogue in the context of participation in public discourses with a view to influencing public policy. In this area, the National Spiritual Assembly is represented in the India Interfaith coalition on HIV and AIDS, Global Foundation for Civilizational Harmony, All India Council of Religions for Peace. Interfaith round tables on women and children health.
3. Protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief: The implementation of human rights norms with respect to freedom of religion or belief is a necessary counterpart to inter-religious

dialogue. An international body based in Kerala of which the National Spiritual Assembly is a member called the International Foundation for Religious Freedom, held a seminar in Kochi and Ms. Marzia Dalal represented the Department of External Affairs in that gathering.

4. Promoting peace and unity: the biggest service of interfaith community is to work towards removal of religious prejudice, and bigotry by promoting independent investigation of truth. This will build a new order of relationships based on mutual respect, love and understanding. It will facilitate the movement towards peace and unity. The National Spiritual Assembly is a member of the Temple of Understanding and the All India Council of Religions for Peace.

In addition there are government agencies specially set up to address the issues of communal harmony and the National Spiritual Assembly is also represented in the National Foundation for Communal Harmony, which is an agency of the Ministry of Home Affairs, through one of its members. Interfaith activities has already evolved as a movement and plays a significant role in generating awareness among peoples and as a means of jointly addressing social problems and offering a platform to religious communities to collectively discuss the problems in society and lend their voice to the cries of the oppressed and afflicted.

Discourse on Equality of Women and Men

The year saw the collaboration of the Department of External Affairs with the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity office from Haifa, when May Lample came to India in November 2010 to join hands with the Department of External Affairs in having meaningful study of the document "Towards Advancing the Equality of Women and Men" with the Centre for Social Research, Participatory Research Institute in Asia (PRIA), Women Power Connect, TINNARI, Multiple Action Research Group(MARG), Draupadi Trust, Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) and Indian Social Studies Trust. The one day study workshop took place with about 7 to 10 individuals working in these organizations coming together for a joint study with the Department of External Affairs. the entire proceedings were recorded and transcribed and with two of them further meeting took place in order to draw upon more concrete examples of application in the work of the NGOs concerned. CASA and PRIA proved to be the most promising and again those meetings were recorded and transcriptions shared with Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity as well. A great deal of learning has been generated with regard to the methods and approaches that can best help in promoting this discourse, the need for having periodic reflections with the organization on the issues being raised and of assisting each other to come ups with possible lines of action that once applied can lead to generation of further knowledge. Communications about the discourse have been sent to UNIFEM, UN for Women, WIPSA, Lady Sri Ram College, Guild of Service and initial meetings held with both of these. Follow up is on for this year. Communications have been sent to AUD (Ambedkar University for Development), NIPCCD, NCW, AIWC, NAWO, AFPRO, Sulabh International. All these are to be pursued further.

UNIFEM has made the following comments after studying the document:
It would however be useful to have a workshop with the Bahais to enrich our own learning and to make our gender training more diverse in terms of newer discourses and arguments that can appeal to the emotion of our stake holders. It will be an added tool in the gender trainings that agencies like UNIFEM have been conducting.

The discourse document has also been studied in Bhubaneswar, Pune, Kochi and Lucknow with groups of over 30 participants.

Survey on Faith-Based Organisations responding to violence against women and girls:

This survey is being conducted by the Asia-Pacific Women, Faith and Development Alliance and UNFPA. The Department of External Affairs also participated in the survey. You can access it at the following link:

Discourse on Governance

In efforts to promote the Discourse on Governance on a broader and extensive scale we had decided to put up a query based on the document prepared by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity ,A conceptual Framework For Advancing research and Knowledge Regarding Effective Governance ,on an online forum hosted by the UN called Solution Exchange Decentralization forum. We received several requests for the entire document from the respondents along with responses to the query that were very pertinent and apt.

Discourse on science, religion and development

Ambedkar University: Introductory presentation for interested professors: 2 hour presentation on the basic principles of the discourse. Initial discussions took place with the Vice Chancellor.

Workshop on Science, Religion and Development- Some Aims and Challenges:

A preliminary discussion on this was held with CASA. In order to learn how to build capacity in development organizations to continuously reflect on their action and to systematize the knowledge generated through their efforts to apply spiritual principles and scientific methods in their plans and programs, the learning of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity in its document May Knowledge Grow in our Hearts will be of great assistance in designing and carrying forward the action research project with CASA.

Capacity Building Seminars for External Affairs work:

The Department of External Affairs was able to conduct five capacity building seminars in the course of 2010-11

1. Luck now - Regional Bahá'í council of UP, Uttarakant and Delhi
2. Bangalore - State Bahá'í Council of Karnataka
3. Kochi - State Bahá'í Council of Kerala
4. Bhubaneswar - State Bahá'í Council of Orissa
5. Pune - Regional Bahá'í Council of Maharashtra and Goa

115 friends participated in total in all the five seminars. It would have been impossible to do this without the help and assistance of the Regional Bahá'í Council and State Bahá'í Councils. All these friends are already engaged in the life of the wider society through the core activities of the Five Year Plan in which they are actively involved. This provided a very good starting point for all to understand the coherence between the processes of expansion and consolidation with social action and contributing to the discourses of society. The programme consisted of study of the Ridvan Message and of understanding the principle of achieving coherence, it went on to the study of the materials of Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity on the discourses on science, religion and development and on gender equality. Some introductory materials of Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity with regard to what is science, what is religion, what is building an ever advancing civilization were also studied. There was an intensive session about building relations with government. Interactive session took place as to what are the means and approaches that we have for building relations such as courtesy calls to acquaint them with the Bahá'ís in their region and what the Bahá'ís are doing for the betterment of the society in the villages and towns, presentation of appropriate materials to the dignitaries, the decorum in meeting, the constitution of the members of the delegation, the importance of Bahá'í women being always a part of the delegation. In addition, to invite government functionaries from either the executive or legislative branch for seminars and discourses that are organized by the Bahá'ís, such as inviting them as chief guests for events, asking them to study the discourse material and react to the comments raised in the document. The participants also had a chance to consult and reflect on the use of the World Wide Web, on the importance of building relations with the media, on developing our ability to articulate in a language that everyone can understand as to who we are and what we do in India in order to serve this society. The three day seminar also had sessions on understanding the importance of activities related to the defense of the Faith as part of our coherent efforts towards the betterment of society. Hence the importance of defense as a mechanism by which a body protects itself and allows for its holistic growth was discussed. This lead to the discussion about the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, the agencies of

the Universal House of Justice, National Spiritual Assembly's Department of External Affairs , the human rights machinery of the United Nations, the resolutions, the Open letters, the press releases and the importance of acting with great speed on all efforts associated with defense.

The need for persistent action and follow up in all the three areas of external affairs work were reiterated, namely: diplomatic work, public information work, and contributing to the discourses of society.



The focus of the seminars was to understand the following:

1. Achieving Coherence and study of certain paragraphs of Ridvan 2010 Message.
2. Participation in Discourses of Society and Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity : In addition to the study of the document, to understand the methods and approaches for participating and contributing to the discourses of society
 - i. Who are the stakeholders? Government, media, NGOs, United Nations, academics, religious leadership, leaders of thought, community leaders, industry, educationists, university students, teachers, tribal development agencies, scientists
 - ii. Collective study of discourse materials in small circles of stakeholders
 - iii. Organizing seminars in collaboration with other organizations
 - iv. Inviting leaders of thought and relevant government functionaries to study discourse material and write their reactions to those
 - v. Writing press release and inviting media to seminars
 - vi. Writing articles for publication in the media
 - vii. Generating further knowledge, meeting with organizations after seminars, writing reports and feedback
 - viii. Enhancing the network of organizations and individuals interested in the discourse

3. Presence on the World wide web: Websites, blogs, face book, twitter
 - Who are we?
 - What do we do?
 - Developing new vocabulary to write and talk about ourselves
 - Demonstration of websites of www.bahai.in; www.bic.org; www.news.bahai.org; www.globalprosperity.org
4. Cultivating relations with government:
 - Structure of governance, government ministries to associate with such as women and child development, culture, education, science and technology; members of legislative assembly, collectors, superintendants of police, panchayati raj institutions
 - Meeting with government officials: principles and qualities of Bahá'í diplomacy
 - Content of discussion with government functionaries: who are we and what we do and presentation of a special kit for such visits.
5. Defense of the Bahá'ís of Iran only if advised to do so by the Department of External Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly: study of relevant documents: UN General Assembly resolution of March 2010, United Nations human rights mechanisms, Update on Bahá'ís of Iran
6. Building relations with the media through invitation for seminars and workshops on discourses as well as by writing articles on contemporary issues highlighting the principles of the Faith that have a bearing on those issues.

In consultation with the Councils, the following mandate is suggested for the taskforces and the Department of External affairs will continue to accompany these taskforces in order to assist them to shoulder their responsibility. It will also arrange for periodic reflections with the taskforces, through meetings, skype and email list serve discussions.

Provision of mandate for the taskforces:

1. Cultivating relations with government.
2. Helping with the work of defence of the Bahá'ís of Iran as and when needed.
3. Cultivating relations with media
4. Promoting the discourse on science, religion and development
5. Promoting the discourse on equality of men and women and documenting the learning generated. Sharing that learning with the Department of External Affairs.

FAITH-INSPIRED ORGANIZATIONS AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY: A BACKGROUND REVIEW:

"MAPPING" SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORK IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

At the invitation of the World Faith Development Dialogue and the Berkley Centre of Georgetown University in Washington DC, the director of Department of External Affairs participated in the consultation on faith-inspired organizations and global development policy in South and Central Asia in Dhaka, Bangladesh on January 10-11, 2011.

The South and Central Asia review was part of a comparative project on Religion and Global Development supported by the Henry R. Luce Foundation. Through a series of meetings with stakeholders and background reports, the Berkley Center and WFDD have worked to “map” the role of faith-inspired organizations around the world, highlighting best practices and policy issues that arise. Prior events have included: a meeting in Washington, DC in April 2007 focused on the United States; a meeting in Doha, Qatar in December 2007 focused on the Muslim World; a meeting in The Hague, The Netherlands in June 2008 focused on Europe and Africa; a meeting in Antigua, Guatemala in January 2009, focused on Latin America; and a meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in December 2009 focused on Southeast Asia.

It was an exploration of religion’s role in development in the region, examined practical, development related roles and work of faith-inspired institutions and the environments in which they work, historically but above all in the present-day, in the two linked but distinct regions of South and Central Asia. Its central aim was what we term a “mapping” of the landscape of faith-inspired organizations working in development, to identify and highlight areas with potential for increased collaboration, and their policy implications. It also set out to identify areas where further investigation and discussion would be useful. A report based largely on desk reviews of existing material and literature, enriched by interviews with specialists and practitioners was presented. The account of the interview is available on the website of Berkley Centre.

It was an extremely enriching experience and it gave the opportunity to talk about what the Bahá’ís are doing in the areas of expansion and consolidation, social action and discourses of society.

External Affairs Consultation of the 11 National Spiritual Assemblies and Diplomatic Seminar in

Acuto, Italy: August-September 2010 provided an opportunity for two colleagues of Department of External Affairs to represent the National Spiritual Assembly at the external affairs consultation of the 11 National Spiritual Assemblies organized by the Bahá’í International Community and subsequently at the Diplomatic Seminar for the defense of the Faith in Acuto, Italy.

-----Prepared by the Department of External Affairs, March 2011-----